

THE
CITY'S DISEASE AND REMEDY.

A Sermon.

PREACHED IN THE FOURTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH, NEW YORK,

ON

THANKSGIVING DAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1883,

BY

HOWARD CROSBY,
PASTOR.

NEW YORK :
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THE CITY'S DISEASE AND REMEDY.

“WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS ARE IN AUTHORITY, THE PEOPLE REJOICE :
BUT WHEN THE WICKED BEARETH RULE THE PEOPLE MOURN.”—
Prov. xxix. 2.

A MAN without moral principle is dangerous anywhere ; and the higher you put him in society, the more dangerous he becomes. His influence is only for evil ; and if you give that influence the additional force of authority, you poison the main channels of political and social life. The poison is the more deadly, the stronger in will and energy the man is. Add to the one unprincipled man in official authority a band of confederates of like sort and you obtain a diseased community, where vice and crime break out on every side from the virulent poisons that have been generated and fostered by the causes referred to. When the vicious elements of a community are found in the lower classes only, and among those who have no significance in the political body, they can be controlled to such an extent as to preserve the general life from evil ; but when those elements include leaders of thought and action, and those

that fill the offices of public trust, then, instead of mere excrescences upon the surface, we have the vitals affected with the disease, and nothing short of the most radical treatment can save the patient.

And this is the condition of New York City to-day. The vicious elements of the city are in places of authority. The wicked bear rule. Men, whom no decent family would allow to enter its door, are set to make the city ordinances. Men, whose touch is pollution, are set to enforce the laws. Men, who are brutalized with strong drink, are set to pass judgment on those who are accused of breaking the laws. Will our fellow-citizens disregard this melancholy fact? It is no exaggeration. Legislators, executive officers, and judges are filthy and vile. Of course there are honorable exceptions (and the judiciary is generally pure, especially in the higher courts), but with these I am not now dealing. The government is rotten if any part of it is rotten. It will not do to call an apple sound because some parts of it are sound. It gets its character from the rotten parts. If one half of it only is rotten, it is a rotten apple, in spite of the other half. The actual, practical government of New York City to-day is allied to the lowest stratum of evil in the city. It is allied to thieves, gamblers, and prostitutes, and hence it is almost an impossibility to bring some of the criminal

classes to punishment, they are so shielded by their sympathizers in office. Every form of delay, refusal of evidence and other obstruction is thrown in the way until the prosecutor gives up in despair and the rascal gets off, free to continue his depredations on the morals of the community. Open and unblushing defiance of law is allowed in the face of the police and police courts, and the law-breakers boast of their pecuniary arrangements with the authorities. "The wicked bear rule and the people mourn." When we look to a good Mayor for relief, we are told by that magistrate that he can appoint to office only those whom ten liquor-sellers approve, and whom ten liquor-sellers will approve we all know. When we look to the District Attorney for relief, he tells us that the calendar is too full, and he has no time to take up new cases. When we look to the Police Commissioners for relief, they say that they can procure no evidence. When we look to the Excise Commissioners for relief—well, it is like washing off black paint with ink. There is no desire, and hence no effort on the part of the authorities, to stay the torrent of vice and crime. If there were such an effort made, too many of the authorities themselves would be found involved. This is the wretched condition of our city to-day. The wicked bear rule and the people mourn. Are we to rest contented with this?

Or are we to fold our hands in despair? Is there not enough virtue and pluck and common-sense in this community to turn the tables and to make it, that the righteous shall be in authority and the people rejoice? This is the other picture which we would look on. This is the possible condition of our city which we are responsible for not making actual. Do you ask, "How shall we do it?" I answer, that the way is perfectly plain.

1. *Let the national party lines be obliterated in this city when city affairs are to be attended to.* What have we to do here with Republicans or Democrats? The only object politicians can have in electing partisans in the city is the unrighteous use of office influence in the general elections. This must be stopped. The great city of New York is not to be sacrificed for the gain of partisans. Our interests are too great and too sacred to be given up to be a foot-ball for politicians, the half of whom are foreigners who know nothing of our civilization or our institutions, and are profoundly ignorant of all political truth. The men in this city who wish good government form a large majority of our population, but this majority is rendered inefficient by being divided between the two parties, each portion voting what they call the "regular ticket," no matter what names are on it. It is for this majority to become consoli-

dated, and, ignoring all party lines, to nominate men of probity for every office. This can be done, not by any well-known political hack prating about an independent citizens' movement and framing it for his private benefit, but by the joint action of (say) a score of our trusted fellow-citizens, who are known to be above party bigotry and private scheming. Such a group of men meeting, and carefully excluding every known politician, and nominating men of character for every office, and furnishing the necessary ballots at every polling-place, would revolutionize the city, and drive the rowdies into oblivion. The \$20,000 that might be necessary to pay the expenses of such a work in providing ballots, stands, placards, and holders, would readily be subscribed by the citizens. One election of this sort would make the following elections far easier to manage, and in a few years we should find the city electing good men without any effort at all. The majority in this city has this power in its hands to-day. Hence the greatness of the sin of leaving the city in the hands of the vile and degraded.

But so long as good men will go with their party and vote for scoundrels, we shall see things go from worse to worse, until there will be no security for life or property in our city. And when the city is destroyed, let the good and moral men understand that

they have done it by their silly adherence to party rather than to truth and righteousness.

2. A second need is *the faithful attention to the voting power given each citizen*. Thousands of good men in the city fail to vote at a city election. "Oh, I don't bother myself about such matters," says one. "I haven't time to vote," says another. "I hate this going to a polling-place, there is such a noisome crowd there," says a third. "It won't make any difference whether I vote or not—what is *one* vote?" says a fourth. And in this way apathy and laziness give up the city to the loafers, who are ready enough to give time and energy to vote the evil element into office. Let me tell such apathetic citizens that they have been made by God rulers in this land, and if they do not exercise their power, God will call them to account. They can not get off with impunity. A vote is a power entrusted you by God. Woe unto you if you hide that power, when you ought to use it! In a monarchical country you could remain passive; but where God has made the citizens kings, you can not. The people rule here, and you are one of the people. You can not abdicate. You can only shirk responsibility. And then the wicked bear rule. It is your duty to give time and discrimination to your vote. It is the single abstainings from voting which make the aggregate remissness. Do your duty, and

at least save your own conscience. A Christian who prays for his country and doesn't vote, prays very inconsistently, if not heartlessly. I find that it is these non-voting citizens who are the principal grunters and growlers at the bad state of things. They fold their hands and groan, when they ought to be up striking the foe. The twenty thousand voters of this city who do *not* vote hold the balance of power, and they alone could control the elections for good, even if the rest kept to their party lines.

3. A third need is *for the good citizen to be public-spirited, and take personal interest in the city where he lives, and whose benefits he enjoys.* Good citizens will allow a nuisance or a gross evil to be established under their eyes, when by taking a few hours of their time they could prevent or remove it. The rogues and rascals take advantage of this supineness, and multiply their engines of evil, knowing that the good people of the neighborhood will not take the trouble to oust them, and knowing also well that the police of themselves would never dream of such a thing.

If you see an act of rowdyism or any form of law-breaking in the street, it is your duty as a citizen and a ruler to call a policeman, tell him to arrest the offender, and offer to accompany him and make the complaint. "Catch *me* giving up an hour of my precious time

for the public!" is your reply. Suppose a nuisance was put upon your doorstep, wouldn't you pretty quickly call the police, and make your complaint? If men should dump the filth of the city in the street in front of your house, and thus threatened you or your family with typhoid fever, wouldn't you call the police and make your complaint? And yet you'll see crime committed before your eyes, and laws broken with impunity, and never attempt to interfere, although this impunity is spreading a moral pestilence through the city worse than typhoid fever. The two thousand policemen of this huge city can not see every wrong that is done. You must help them. Moreover, in many cases a policeman's testimony alone is not accepted by the courts against the oath of the defendant. There is need of an additional witness, and you are that witness. But when you see a gross wrong, you hurry away lest you might be taken as a witness, and your precious time be encroached upon. And that's the way you do your duty as a citizen for the peace and order of the city. Ah! when shall we have citizens of public spirit? Again, why do you not attend the primaries, and see to it that decent men are nominated? Why do you leave nominations to the dregs of your party? Why do you give to a minority, who keep or frequent rum-holes, the management of your party? Is it your laziness, or your

overwhelming selfishness, or are you satisfied with things as they are? Turn over a new leaf, I beseech you. Think of your duty, and do it. Give time and thought to the welfare of the city which nourishes you. Take interest in all its public affairs. Express your opinions, and endorse them by actions. Don't be afraid of what others may say or do. You are a sovereign, and can be independent. Join the army of those who are determined to fight until every rum-hole, every gambling den, and every house of prostitution is swept away out of our city.

There is a society of men who have no interest in party politics, which is now laboring to achieve a victory over these civic evils. The society has been fighting six years. It has received very little sympathy, very little money, although obliged to pay agents to accomplish its designs. It is a society which has no selfish purpose, but simply seeks to *enforce law* and to uphold the hands of good magistrates against the evil influence and activity of the bad ones. It has been successful in staying the tide of law-breaking to a degree. It has been able to mark progress in several directions. Its work has developed the fact of the enormous corruption existing in our city government. It has sent to prison many prominent offenders. But its hands are enfeebled by want of funds. Its field of accomplishment is tantalizingly

restricted from this cause. The politicians of both parties hate it because it exposes their rowdy supporters, and shows how our statesmen keep disorderly houses, and break the laws as part of their statesmanship. Now, then, brethren, I hesitate not to say that it is your duty, as citizens, to support this society, the Society for the Prevention of Crime, and make it strong to perform its task. The eighteen men who compose its board are all busy workers, but they find time to look after the interests of the city. But they can not give *all* their time. They must attend to their domestic and business duties. They must employ salaried men to attend constantly to the work of purifying the city.

Will you help them with hard cash? Will you sympathize with them and their work in a practical way?

If this society is sustained it will do the pioneer work, but all good citizens must arise to a sense of their responsibility and their power, and follow the principles we have enunciated, if the city is to be redeemed from the hands of the base and vicious.

The wicked now bear rule, and the people mourn. If the good citizens will only do their duty, the righteous will be in authority, and the people will rejoice.

“What sort of a Thanksgiving sermon is this,” do you say? It is all complaint and not thanksgiving.

ing. No ! brethren, the very basis of the complaint is a grand source of thanksgiving. The basis of the complaint is the privilege God has given us to rectify the great evil. We are by God's good providence so situated in this city, as free and independent voters, that we have it in our power to overturn the powers of wickedness in high places. We are not held down by absolutism. We are not slaves, but freemen. It is for us to thank God that our condition is not hopeless, that Christian truth has permeated the mass of our fellow-citizens, and made its deep impression for morality and law, and that the moral sentiment of the great majority is just and healthy. God has given us wondrous blessings. Let us be full of thanksgiving, and not abuse His mercies by our neglect. Let us make the potentiality a reality by using our privileges and acting conscientiously before God in discharging the duties of citizenship.

